

NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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Nebraska Showcases Law-Related Education and Media Programs at National Conference of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators Annual Meeting



Representatives of the PEOPLE (Public Education Outreach Promoting Law & Equity) Committee were recently invited to showcase two unique programs at the Civics Education Fair in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Conference of Chief Justices in St. Louis.

The programs, cooperative ventures between the Nebraska Supreme Court and the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, were the annual Law Day Job Shadowing program for fifth graders and the journalist education sessions. The programs represent one project from each of the two PEOPLE subcommittees: Law Related Education (LRE) and Media Outreach.

"We are honored to be one of a handful of states selected to showcase our community outreach projects to this distinguished audience," said PEOPLE Committee Chair Judge Lyle E. Strom. "The educational partnership between the State Bar Foundation and the Supreme Court has benefitted Nebraskans, both youth and adults, across the state," he added.

Immediately prior to the Chief Justices' civics fair, all Justices and State Court Administrators attended a seminar regarding the importance of the court system's participation in civics education. Seminar panelist, West Virginia State Court Administrator Steven Canterbury, remarked that "We will lose the Democracy if we don't have people educated in how democracy works." He continued that one of the largest challenges comes through implementation of standardized testing in schools, given that national standards do not include civics education. He stated, "We can either wait around to see if things change, or we can just get in and try to do our part – that is what the judges of West Virginia have been trying to do."

The civics fair itself featured a dozen state organizations and a few private civic education programs. All were selected by the National Center for State Courts to share programming with the nationwide audience of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators.

In his introduction of the program, Conference of Chief Justices President Eric T. Washington noted that the Chief Justices deviated from their normal agenda by presenting civics information in an interactive setting. He noted, "We are hosting a civics education fair to showcase the variety of programs that exist and are developed by Courts and other organizations throughout the country. The organizations that have put them together are here to let us know that we don't have to start from scratch, that there are programs out there that we can learn from, and learn about."

Nebraska's jointly held LRE programs are organized under the Supreme Court and the State Bar Foundation's PEOPLE Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to help judges, foundation members and volunteer personnel develop skills in public outreach, community collaboration, community leadership, and public service.

The Media Subcommittee develops materials for spokespersons to communicate with the media, recruits lawyers state-wide to act as spokespersons if necessary, and educates members of the media (reporters and editors) and journalism classes (high school and post-secondary) about the role of the judiciary. The workshops for journalists are offered as brown bag luncheons, regional seminars, or appellate coverage roundtables. In recent years, the subcommittee has extended its mission to include educating voters and jurors.



The Nebraska State Bar Foundation is Nebraska's designated State Center for Law-Related Education by Youth for Justice, a cooperative program supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the United States Department of Justice. The Foundation sponsors the Nebraska High School Mock Trial Project, the *Reaching the Age of Majority* booklet, and various Law Day celebration activities.

Together with the Court, the Foundation sponsors Constitution Day activities and engages in adding distance delivery options to its LRE offerings.

Photos

TOP: (L to R) Conference participant reviews materials offered at the Nebraska Civics Education Fair booth with Public Information Officer Janet Bancroft, Nebraska State Court Administrator Janice Walker, Chief Justice Mike Heavican and State Bar Foundation Executive Director Doris Huffman.

BOTTOM: Public Information Officer Janet Bancroft (left) and State Bar Foundation Executive Director Doris Huffman (center) interviewed by National Center for State Courts videographer for podcast.